

FROM WITHIN

Order of Service (bulletin)

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Video (recorded live stream)

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September 27, 2026

Pentecost 18

Philippians 2:1-13

If our life in Christ means anything to you - if love, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness or sympathy can persuade you at all - then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing that would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit, but everybody is to be humble: value others over yourselves, each of you thinking of the interests of others before your own. Your attitude must be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Christ, though in the image of God, didn't deem equality with God something to be clung to - but instead became completely empty and took on the image of oppressed humankind: born into the human condition, found in the likeness of a human being. Jesus was thus humbled—obediently accepting death, even death on a cross! Because of this, God highly exalted Christ and gave to Jesus the name above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God; Jesus Christ reigns supreme!

Therefore, my dear friends, you who are always obedient to my urging, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, not only when I happen to be with you, but all the more now that I'm absent. It is God at work in you that creates the desire to do God's will.

1986 Apology to Indigenous Peoples

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ. We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel. We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be. We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.



As we began our church service today, we heard words from four decades ago, first spoken during the 31st General Council meeting of the United Church of Canada. Words of an apology. An apology that recognized that in an excitement to share good news that was known and experienced by European religious newcomers: and how that excitement overshadowed what could be known and experienced from new learnings. It was based on a level of imperial arrogance, a confidence that was common at the time. And as a result, ears and eyes and hearts and minds were closed. What could have been a two-way street, what should have been a two-way street, was viewed as a one-way high-speed highway.

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It is said that time heals all wounds. But I don't know anyone who believes that because we all know that other than in only in the rarest of circumstances, healing needs a lot more help than what time can give it. The 1986 apology from the United Church of Canada to the indigenous peoples within the church spoke of healing. Moderator Smith said, "Let's walk together so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed." The language of walking together, journeying together, speaks of an ongoing connection, a desire to not stay where we are, but move towards some other place alongside each other and along the way begin to experience healing. In these last 40 years since these words were spoken, these words have not relied on time as the sole provider of healing.

In 1988, just two years after the apology was first read at the 32nd General Council meeting of the United Church of Canada, the Indigenous Church within the United Church reminded those commissioners that words alone, although sometimes powerful, are only symbolic. But it is a sincere action that will reflect on whether those words are ultimately true and have value. A statement that's only spoken once or even a statement that's repeated in the words that were spoken that first time means very little. 1988 was also the year that the United Church of Canada tinkered with its governance structure, adding a new conference. At the time, the United Church of Canada was a four-level church. One of the four decision-making levels of the church was the Conference, and it had certain duties and responsibilities within the life of the church. At the time, the conferences were all geographically based. You could draw lines on the map and say, "Here's where one conference starts and here's where one conference ends." 1988 saw the creation of the All Native Circle Conference, which invited many indigenous ministries and congregations and preaching points to organize themselves within presbyteries and conferences that were not geographically identified. So the All Native Circle Conference gathered up many of these indigenous ministries from all over the country and they fulfilled, within their sphere of influence, the duties of a conference. In 2019, some of you may remember that the United Church of Canada restructured itself from a four-level church down to a three-level church and presbyteries and conferences (which were the middle areas between congregations and the national church) gave way to a single middle body known as regional councils. The indigenous church at the time was not convinced that simply moving the All Native Circle Conference into the new middle body (a region) was the right path forward.

You know, a number of things happened between 1988 and 2019.

- One, the United Nations made a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and that affected the people who were indigenous to the land that became known as Canada.
- Also in that time between 1988 and 2019, the United Church of Canada agreed to settle a massive lawsuit from residential school survivors. Actually, 18 years earlier than that, another moderator, the right Reverend Bill Phipps, had offered an apology directly to those affected by United Church run residential schools, their families, and their communities. Reverend Phipps read these words as part of that apology.

On behalf of The United Church of Canada, I apologize for the pain and suffering that our church's involvement in the Indian Residential School system has caused. We are aware of some of the damage that this cruel and ill-conceived system of assimilation has perpetrated on Canada's First Nations peoples. For this we are truly and most humbly sorry.

- As part of the government's side of the lawsuit settlement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established, which you may recall, gatherings were held all around the country that documented information and stories. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission wrote a report which included 94 Calls to Action, some of which were specifically geared toward the churches. As a result of those calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the 43rd General Council of the United Church

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of Canada, which met in 2018, adopted Calls to the Church as recommended by the caretakers of the Indigenous Circle of the United Church of Canada. And these calls affected the United Church's governance restructure in 2019. Particularly, part of that restructuring was to move all of the oversight for ministry students and ministers in the church to a single body called the Office of Vocation at the national level as opposed to before it used to be: the presbytery level. The 2019 restructuring created Board of Vocation admissions boards and candidacy committees that was dedicated toward the indigenous ministers and ministry students. In a bigger picture, the 2019 restructuring didn't force an overall organizational structure on the indigenous church. As I mentioned, the leaders of the indigenous church wasn't sure at the time whether transitioning from a conference to a region was the right path forward. You may even recall what was called Remit #1 a few years ago, that preemptively made changes to the United Church's Basis of Union in order to give the indigenous church a level of self-determination on deciding what structure would best make sense for the indigenous church within the United Church of Canada. Remit #1 used proactively language that said *when you've come up with what that structure is, you don't need to come back to the whole church to get those changes ratified*. We proactively said, "Whatever you decide is what you decide." In the meantime, the National Indigenous Elders Council of the United Church of Canada is working toward establishing and creating and discerning what governance structure should embody the indigenous church within the United Church of Canada. That work continues.

For 40 years, we have been journeying and we are continuing to journey together toward reconciliation and healing. And this is not because words came out of Bob Smith's mouth in 1986. It's because the people of the church, indigenous and non-indigenous, took those words to heart and let them become ways of faithful living. Now work that's not perfect; the work that is definitely not complete because completion was never the goal. Right Relations is the goal. It's always work in progress because we are always evolving in thought and relationships are not static.

All of this follows the pattern that the Apostle Paul wrote in that letter to the early church of Philippi. It's with humility and valuing the lives and the interests of others that we are able to seek a path forward together. Long before it became the modern catchphrase Paul invited the people of the early church to ask: What Would Jesus Do?

Act not out of arrogance but out of humility. Paul wrote: act not out of a sense of superiority but as a community that values each other and others beyond your community. Don't act out of a certainty but act with humble hearts and minds and souls that are willing to learn, change and grow. Act not out of isolation but as partners in shared community.

Some of us are wearing orange today anticipating the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation that is happening on Wednesday. It's always September 30th. It's a statutory holiday in six of Canada's provinces and territories. Nationally, it is a stat holiday for all federal workers and for those in federally regulated industries. That doesn't necessarily include all of us. Alberta is not one of those six provinces that makes September 30th a holiday for everyone, but Alberta is one of three provinces that gives the statutory holiday to its provincial government employees. Regardless, Spirit of Hope United Church gives Truth and Reconciliation Day as a paid day off to it's paid staff: so the office is closed on Wednesday.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation honors residential school survivors, their families, their communities, and it offers set aside time to deepen our understanding of the effects of residential schools and to be part of the ongoing healing journey that is happening and is continuing. Truth, healing, and reconciliation

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along with the time that we intentionally put into that is the path we are on. And it's interesting to figure out where it might end.

If you read a prepared set of words, however meaningful or heartfelt, they exist only in the moment that they're read. But if we allow those words along with other learnings and other experiences to become part of who we are, then in the humblest of attitudes, it can affect how we live with each other in this world. And when we do that, there is no limit to how awesome and great this existence with each other can become.

Amen.

#49TLUS You Are My Strength

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